



# **The Loneliness of the Black Republican: Pragmatic Politics and the Pursuit of Power**

*Leah Wright Rigueur*

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Covering more than four decades of American social and political history, *The Loneliness of the Black Republican* examines the ideas and actions of black Republican activists, officials, and politicians, from the era of the New Deal to Ronald Reagan's presidential ascent in 1980. Their unique stories reveal African Americans fighting for an alternative economic and civil rights movement--even as the Republican Party appeared increasingly hostile to that very idea. Black party members attempted to influence the direction of conservatism--not to destroy it, but rather to expand the ideology to include black needs and interests.

As racial minorities in their political party and as political minorities within their community, black Republicans occupied an irreconcilable position--they were shunned by African American communities and subordinated by the GOP. In response, black Republicans vocally, and at times viciously, critiqued members of their race and party, in an effort to shape the attitudes and public images of black citizens and the GOP. And yet, there was also a measure of irony to black Republicans' "loneliness": at various points, factions of the Republican Party, such as the Nixon administration, instituted some of the policies and programs offered by black party members. What's more, black Republican initiatives, such as the fair housing legislation of senator Edward Brooke, sometimes garnered support from outside the Republican Party, especially among the black press, Democratic officials, and constituents of all races. Moving beyond traditional liberalism and conservatism, black Republicans sought to address African American racial experiences in a distinctly Republican way.

*The Loneliness of the Black Republican* provides a new understanding of the interaction between African Americans and the Republican Party, and the seemingly incongruous intersection of civil rights and American conservatism.

## The Loneliness of the Black Republican: Pragmatic Politics and the Pursuit of Power Details

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# **From Reader Review The Loneliness of the Black Republican: Pragmatic Politics and the Pursuit of Power for online ebook**

## **Arion Williams says**

A reviewer named Vonetta summed the book up masterfully. I found the scenarios to be so repetitive, meaning, the question of how republicans could win the black vote was being asked over and over again and not even differently. However, the tools to answer the question differed only in spoken message. For the better part of four decades, Blacks within the GOP have been trying, with measured attempts, to fight the battle of creating policy for the betterment of Black people from the inside and hoping to sway the majority (white men) in the party. At the same time, falling out of favor with the people of their community because they weren't radical enough. Lose-Lose scenario almost.

Contextually, I can understand how you can't be a worker/laborer and be a republican. The writer made it expressly clear that the Black Republicans all came from opportunistic backgrounds which lent credence to their mantra of self-help, self-respect, capitalism, and economic equality while also making the case for more purposeful civil rights legislation. It's like a mixed message. On the one hand, black republicans are saying to the black working class, work hard and strive to do better. Good things will come. On the other, they are trying to enact policies that will ENABLE black to reap good things if they are willing to work for them.

I felt heavy after reading. Almost to the point of thinking that people of color weren't necessarily meant to participate in the traditional 2-party political system. At the end of the day, both republicans and democrats need to put forth policies that promote economic/social/class uplift for all people of color IN ADDITION TO developing innovative ways to root out institutional racism. To think otherwise feels like falling down the rabbit hole of being "colorblind."

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## **Patrice says**

I'm dancing the can can in my seat! I've been reading this book longer than anything ever. I started in 2015 and tapped out. I tried to finish it in 2016 and 2 other times in 2017 but this time I am victorious!

Excellent book. Well researched and documented. The problem is that it is clear the Republican party has had their answer on how to fix their problem with Black voters but refuse to. The history is fascinating and if you have ever questioned how any Black person could be a Republican read this book. My entire family would be Republicans if they didn't use so many anti-Black appeals, so I get it.

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## **Ari says**

"Inevitably, the GOP finds itself divided, roughly split between those who believe the minority vote is unwinnable and those who endorse a more inclusive outreach strategy, aimed not only at disaffected white voters but also at African American and Latino voters. [...] Exclusively focusing on white voters, while ignoring racial minorities, is an unsustainable strategy; likewise, symbolic short-term outreach efforts to these marginalized racial groups will not work because such appeals feel disingenuous given the contradictory positions of the GOP's mainstream coupled with the reactionary and extremist behaviors of the

party's fringe." (309)

It will never cease to amaze me with how cyclical American history is, this quote regarding Republican efforts to 'play both sides' and woo Black voters while also the white working class could have been written today; "The GOP's multiplicity did not last, for within the decade-as Bunche rightly warned-the continued pursuit of both the 'lily-white' vote and the black vote alienated the majority of the black electorate, a division exacerbated by the civil rights activism of the presidential administration of Harry S. Truman" (25). As further proof, look at the incredible quote I opened this review with, it could easily be applied to both political parties. Democrats are essentially having the same battle with certain strategists and professors urging them to abandon 'identity politics' while the rest of us understand how crucial those are to GOTV efforts/effective policy.

I can generally power through all kinds of non fiction as long as the topic is one that I'm interested in, this book was the first exception. Black Republicans have always intrigued me so I was drawn to the premise of the book but unfortunately it's not written in the most engaging manner. I think this only bothered me because it took me MONTHS to finish this book and I've read some really strong non fiction over the last year that has been both captivating and brimming with detail. I also wish more time had been spent on Black Republican women, they are mentioned and given brief backgrounds (and featured on the cover which I do LOVE) but they didn't seem as central to the story which I'm sure is not an omission on the author's part due to the sexism of the day but it would have been nice to see them pushed forward a bit more.

"In short, the NBRC encouraged African Americans to join the GOP because there were fewer blacks in the party and thus fewer obstacles in the assuming political power" (214), this struck me as particularly hilarious because when I first told my parents I wanted to work in politics they joked the quickest way for me to move up would be to identify as a Republican. It's both amusing and sad that this was a tactic actually used to encourage party membership and I suspect (especially after reading this book) this idea is still in the back of a few Black Republicans' minds. I also find this tidbit about Obama fairly mind-blowing in its straightforwardness, the author quotes his (much beleaguered in some circles) 2013 Morehouse speech and notes; "Here was a vision of American meritocracy that subtly touched on institutional discrimination but suggested that it was up to the *individual* to overcome inequality-through economic uplift-with measured help from the government; certainly, the president's talk offered a position that blended liberal and conservative elements, while both emphasizing and decentralizing the significance of race, an argument that undoubtedly looks familiar to the reader, by this point in the study" (308). I haven't read many books yet that cover Obama's presidency in full but this simple way of explaining some of his appeal has really stuck with me over the last few days.

This seems to me to be one of the most comprehensive, if not THE, essential unbiased read on the history of Black GOP support combined with insights based on historical analysis of what the Republican needs to do (and has known it needs to do since at least the '40s) to capture more of the Black vote. I wish it had been less of a dry read but it is remarkably thorough which makes it a wonderful resource. The partisan Democrat in me does not want Republicans to read the book, but the Black woman in me, believes this is a helpful read so that Democrats know to stay on their toes and continue to ramp up Black outreach efforts. And most of the quotes and memos can still be applied to our current political situation. This quote from Arthur Fletcher is damning and still stings to this day in the age of Trump, "A black Republican campaigning in a predominantly black district is campaigning before people who were not surprised at all by...Watergate [...] They have been the victims of all kinds of political shenanigans...on the other hand, the white candidate is confronted with it because Watergate seems to have embarrassed the kind of idealism that much of white America has allowed itself to believed existed in our political system." (205)

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### **Vonetta says**

America may be the most complex country ever to have existed in the course of human history. I know that's crazy to say, but I think it might be true. Wright Rigueur brings an obscure history to light, and she does it well, covering the middle 40-ish years of the 20th century. I will say that her decision to stop in ~1980 annoyed me at first, but after having read the book, I understand: history tells you a lot about the present. I appreciate that she wrote this book, partly because she gives an element of Black history that's usually ignored and partly because it inspired me to continue giving a damn (i.e., voting). Her prose is a little wordy and academic, but the content is solid. To sum up the premise: Blacks have had great ideas that could have been very additive to the GOP, but politicians instead chose to pander to racist white voters because there were more of them, leaving Black republicans in the cold, over and over and over again, while these Black GOPers were also ridiculed by their own people, who didn't always understand what was happening behind the scenes. Same thing goes on today. As frustrating and circular as it was, I'm glad I read it.

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### **Katie Hanna says**

Intriguing read. Not quite as much fun as some of my other school texts this semester, but I still learned a lot.

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### **Andre Richards says**

It goes in depth about the reasons many black people left the Republican party. Important book, as many people oversimplify the reasons, or say that everything happened in the 60's.

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